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The Social Context of Social Policy in Social Work in Japan

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1. Diversity of the Welfare System

The "welfare system" can be described as a mechanism for people to support each other's lives. The foundation of the welfare system is thought to be the family. There are several types of "family structure" and it is perceived that the differences in family structure are reflected in the welfare system. The great change brought about by modernisation and globalisation has resulted in the foundation of this welfare system, namely the family, being shaken. Even through such change, the family structure has been relatively sustained as, in times of change, it is thought that people come together and function as a matrix of image unification.⁽¹⁾

Therefore, by thinking in this way, it becomes possible to understand how the welfare state, in the capacity of welfare system, takes on diverse forms. Understanding the diversity of the welfare system is, (1) to clarify the universal role that the welfare system plays, (2) to use a multilateral approach in realising the well-being of the people, and furthermore, (3) to lay down a path to deal extensively with anti-welfare situations.

2. Characteristics of the Welfare System of Japan

It is clear that the characteristics of the Japanese welfare system are based on the premise of the family. The idea of belonging to the family is also connected with belonging to the nation and enterprise. The fundamental framework of the Japanese welfare system shows that by family in Japan, what we mean is "stem family". The characteristics of this stem family are authoritarianism and inequality based on non-individualistic ideas. Other nations with stem families include Germany, Sweden, South Korea, and so on.⁽²⁾

In Japan, a clear distinction is made between people included in the family and those who are not. If someone is a member of the family, the family members will take care of each other. Similarly, if someone is a member of the family called the enterprise as an employee, or a member of the family called the nation as a citizen, their respective livelihoods will be secured.

The welfare system of Japan, based on the principle of belonging to the family, enterprise, or nation, from one point of view, through inclusion, enables people to have secure lives, but on the other hand, the system can bring about extreme oppression and exclusion. Unity of the family as a group is regarded as important and through family members' mutual help, a stable life can be achieved. Therefore, in order to stabilise and maintain family structure, it is required that family members abide by the rules. Where family orders are not being obeyed, consequently jeopardizing family unity and sustainability, then that family member will be excluded from that group called the family. A similar system for exclusion exists at the enterprise and nation levels.

The welfare system of Japan is formed in such a way that the nation (as the largest family) subsumes the citizens (as family members). With regard to welfare provided by the official nation, Japan as a welfare state is looked upon as being a low-welfare and low-cost style of welfare state. The reason for this comes down to the fact that the welfare system of Japan is constructed on the assumption that necessary welfare will be provided by the family household and, this portion of welfare which is shouldered by the family household is not seen in the eyes of others. This assumption of the Japanese welfare system, that welfare is provided by the family household when necessary, implies self help and self support by the family as a unit. The welfare state of Japan is formed taking into account the invisible welfare provided by the family = economic independence = managing body which practices self-help and self-support = self-management.⁽³⁾

I think that the above welfare system or welfare state of Japan, with importance placed on feeling a sense of belonging to a family, would be not be easy for people in the UK to imagine. The reason for this being that the family structure in the UK and USA is classified as the "absolute nuclear family" with characteristics of liberalism and non-egalitarianism ways of thinking and with importance placed on the individual independence of the family member. (For example, in Japan, it is often desirable for a child, who has reached adulthood, to cohabit with their parents. However, in countries like the UK, children who reach adulthood will, in principle, live independently of their parents.) Nations with absolute nuclear families include England, USA, Australia, Denmark, Holland, and so on.⁽⁴⁾

In a family there are husband and wife, parent and child, and sibling relationships.

However, in an absolute nuclear family, importance is placed on individuality with each of the respective relationships. This family image is not one of a united group like in Japan, but of a gathering together of independent individuals. As a family, it is important to give consideration to, and recognize various *individual* concerns and interests and on identifying differences, come to a mutual agreement. For these countries, unlike Japan, to prioritise belonging to the family group before individuality would only result in oppression of individuality and restriction of liberty.

The nation can be considered a matrix, within which an independent individual in the form of a citizen forms part of the civil society. The society composed of liberal citizens creates room for autonomous living, and with excessive state intervention, government rule should be minimal. This kind of ideology of liberalism is thought to reflect the family structure of the Anglo-Saxons.

Liberalism is not a type of governance by which a nation gives orders to citizens but rather governance to create liberty to secure their freedom, and create an atmosphere whereby people are able to act freely. The rules of liberalism are that all individuals are personally required to give due consideration to safety, and to take care not to become subject to anything that may be of danger to society as a whole. In Japan it is not the individual but the family that is the subject of governance, but it can be said that it is governance to maintain group order.

Starting with family structure, it is considered important to understand the various types of welfare system due to differences in the rules of the nation and society. The welfare system, albeit a governance which intervenes, also provides security for people's lives. Michel Foucault regarded neo-liberalism as a new technique of governance, and that governance is called bio-politics.⁽⁵⁾ On analyzing the welfare system as bio-politics and adding the diversity of the family structure, it is thought that a better grasp of the differences of the welfare system is achieved.

3. Limitations of the Welfare State of Japan⁽⁶⁾

The characteristic of the Japanese welfare system is that the family is at the core of the system, but at the same time its limitation also lies in the family. There are 3 main limitations faced by the welfare state of Japan as follows.

Firstly, due to the rapid advance towards an ageing population and declining birth rate, difficulties will occur in the areas of support and care, which have been shouldered by the family. The proportion of the ageing population in 2010 is approximately 23%, estimated to

rise to 29% in the year 2025. The total fertility rate was 1.37 in 2009 and the replacement-level fertility has been decreasing over a long period of time. The decline in the general population has already begun. Under these circumstances it is becoming difficult for the family alone to shoulder the burden of support and care of elderly parents.

Secondly, the rapid deterioration in the employment situation has resulted in the destabilisation of the livelihood of the family household. The Japanese welfare system has been based on the premise that enterprises secure employment and the family wage in turn guaranteeing the livelihood of the family (bread winner model). With the rapid deterioration of the global economy since the 1990s, Japan's enterprises are introducing mobilisation and flexibility of employment. The Japanese welfare system sustained by employment and earned income, which supports the family's livelihood, has been comparatively restrained due to redistribution of income for social security payments. Social security income is therefore inadequate during times of long-term unemployment, creating an increase in problems with poverty. Furthermore, the worsening employment situation is affecting people marrying at a young age and child rearing, another factor contributing to the falling birth rate.

Thirdly, it is difficult to obtain consensus from citizens regarding the provision of state welfare. The welfare system of Japan is largely dependant on belonging to enterprise or family. It can be said that if one of those do not function properly, the nation's safety net is fragile. If welfare provided by enterprise and family has reached its limit, expansion of welfare from the nation will become increasingly necessary in order to support people's lives. However, the respective enterprises and families have a strong tendency of challenging the nation's contribution to welfare in favor of prioritising relative's welfare. Also, in this situation, difficulties can be expected in adjusting the state welfare benefit and costs due to an increase in the clash of inter-generational interests. Furthermore, with financing being largely reliant on public loans, an accumulating budget deficit, and no expectation of increase in revenue, expansion of state welfare will become even more difficult.

4. Japan, the Welfare State and Neo-liberalism⁽⁷⁾

The nation finds itself in a difficult situation regarding the expansion of welfare provision as the family and enterprise, which have until now supported Japan's welfare system, are becoming unable to provide welfare. With this being the situation, more emphasis is now being placed on the individual. Under Japan's policy until now, the family considers the connection with culture and tradition a valuable one, and it can be said that the individual being given a clear placing is an extremely new phenomenon.

The following extracts regarding social security are taken from "The Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century" in 2000:⁽⁸⁾

"Social security is not something that can be considered in isolation. We emphasize that it is important to ensure a balance with various economic and social systems and practices. This being the case, we believe we should abandon our passive reliance on state and public institutions to provide a uniform peace of mind in the form of social security. Instead, individual choice exists and, let's say we have reached an era where we should carry out systems preparations in support of this."⁽⁹⁾

And, it explains that, as importance is now being placed on the individual's independent choice, this will result in "strictly limiting the Government's role".

"Making individual responsibility the basis and diversifying the range of individual options also means changing the role of government, which will have to be strictly limited. This must be more than a matter of streamlining; the aim must be to improve the efficiency of government and thereby raise the level of quality of services provided to the public. The fundamental principle should be that the government will handle only those areas that the private sector is incapable of handling".⁽¹⁰⁾

"Even as the role of the Government is strictly limited, domestic roles involving the protection of people's lives from disaster, accidents and environmental deterioration, still exist. However, we are entering an era where the Government alone cannot perform these functions. As much as we may try, we cannot achieve absolute safety. And, as we have learned from the experience of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, in a highly developed society like ours, it is impossible for the Government to provide all the necessary services across the board in an emergency. Naturally, the government must establish appropriate legislation and necessary procedures for crisis management, but the key to a successful response is adequate advance disclosure of information concerning dangers, a joint crisis-management setup, and a strong cooperative relationship among the national government, local governments, businesses, local communities, civil society organizations, and others with regard to both preparatory measures and post-emergency countermeasures."⁽¹¹⁾

The role that the nation takes on in respect of social security is the minimum necessary level. Each individual takes self-responsibility and the Government will only do what cannot

be done by the private sector. However, even in times of disaster and accident, the Government cannot shoulder the burden alone and "it will be impossible for the Government to provide necessary services throughout". The characteristic sought after, in such a risk society, is "individuals who can control their own lives".

"The lives of the Japanese are divided broadly into three stages: the acquisition of knowledge through education, work and child rearing, and finally old age. To achieve this self-realisation, however, essentially life should be a single continuum. People should be able to choose the lifestyle that best meets their needs at every life stage, regardless of gender, and age. Making this possible requires the formulation of integrated policies that address education, employment, child rearing, continuing education and training, medical care, care services for the elderly and disabled, pensions, economic revitalization, and so on as a whole. It is natural for people to prefer high-benefit, low-burden policies, but such policies are not sustainable. Therefore the relationship between costs and benefits should be articulated and policy options presented in an easily understood manner so that individuals can plan each life stage as they wish.

The minimum necessary social security must be guaranteed by the state and public institutions. Over and above that, however, individuals should choose from among diverse options on their own initiative to support a self-reliant way of life. The systems of long-term employment and seniority-based pay and promotion have fallen apart, companies' life spans have shrunk, and the age when employment was synonymous with joining a company is coming to an end. The new requirements are fair assessment of one's skills, the ability to engage in satisfying work, the ability to choose from among a number of employment formats, and the provision of opportunities to develop skills and start over throughout life even if one changes jobs.

The idea of individuals choosing the kinds of pensions that suit their own life plans, paying in for a period so that they can receive benefits later in life, will be important. It will also be necessary to increase options with regard to elderly care services, preventive medicine, and public health services.

Society will never be free of uncertainty, nor will individual anxieties disappear. What is needed is not the eradication of uncertainty and anxiety but resolve to coexist with uncertainty and anxiety, using them as a springboard to explore new horizons."⁽¹²⁾

Up until now, the welfare system of Japan has dealt with various risks of the nation and its individual citizens, associated families and enterprise according to the group to which

they belong. Also, in the case of not belonging to such a group, the nation has not officially denied responsibility as guarantor of the ultimate risk. As previously stated, citizens must accept self-responsibility for the various risks attached to their chosen options. At the same time the nation's responsibility for accepting risk is strictly limited. With natural disasters and accidents, even when the risk is normally assumed by the nation, it is said that the nation cannot hold responsibility. If that is so, the minimum level of social security from the nation will substantially become very limited, meaning that the actual welfare needed by the people will fall.

Also, with regards to employment, labour flexibility is called for in changing job, and diversification of employment functions. Also, it is necessary to strive to be an individual who makes use of one's own human capital to conduct oneself like an entrepreneur. However, to the majority of people, flexibility of labour implies insecurity of employment. Also, using your own initiative to self manage your work, facilitates the regulation of labour and at the same time, inexpensive manpower becomes more easily attainable.

This type of risk individualisation and labour flexibilisation can be seen as characteristics of neo-liberalism. The radically progressing policy of the market fundamentalism style of free competition in Japan has never come to the forefront as much as now. On this point, extreme disparity as in America has not occurred. However, risk individualisation and labour flexibilisation deal a direct blow to the family and enterprise, which provided invisible welfare and formed the key point of the welfare system of Japan. On top of that, the relatively low provision of welfare by the nation will be further cut back to the minimum level.

5. Welfare as Commons⁽¹³⁾

Whilst the Japanese welfare system, structured around belonging to the nation, enterprise, or family, is a low welfare, low burden welfare state, compared to other advanced nations, the gap between the rich and the poor is comparatively small and the level of safety is being maintained. In other words, although the role of the Government is relatively small, its governance is effective. We can think of the Japanese welfare system as governance through belonging to the nation, the enterprise and the family. This system of governance regulates labour in the place to which the people belong. The welfare system of Japan is the economy of labour with regard to the nation, the enterprise, and the family and can be said to be a system for the governance of labour. People's welfare will be secured according to their placing within the Economy of labour. In other words, it can be said that the welfare system of Japan is governance in labour.⁽¹⁴⁾

The welfare system of Japan has long been supported by the provision of vast amounts of "invisible" welfare by many people through their everyday lives. This invisible welfare is by virtue of shadow work and unpaid work of many people. Unfortunately, the welfare system of Japan is also sustained by the exclusion and abandonment from the system of those people who do not belong to the nation, the enterprise, or the family. The disused "welfare" portion of those who are in need of welfare but have been subject to invisibilisation, is used elsewhere.⁽¹⁵⁾ The principle of the Japanese welfare system is "Welfare IS Work". In Japan, life belongs to work by way of excessive inclusion. First of all, there is inclusion in overworked and overpopulated labour symbolised by the word "karoushi" (meaning "death from overwork").⁽¹⁶⁾ Then, there is exclusion from labour of those abandoned people who are deprived of a place of belonging and are exposed to "the bare life".⁽¹⁷⁾ In this way, Japan's welfare system is sustained at the sacrifice of the labour and lives of the people.

I think that, in Britain social protection for individuals coming together with common interests was formed under the ideology of individualism and liberalism. Japan has never experienced a welfare state like Britain's, where the individual is protected as a citizen within the society. Also, the welfare system of Japan differs from that of Britain in that it is not enough to make just the individual the subject of welfare. The possibilities that exist for Social Work in Japan lie in the potential ability of those people who have provided invisible welfare. What is strongly required of Social Work in Japan is to make visible that welfare which is currently subject to invisibilisation, to bring together those people who are isolated into groups, and then to clearly classify the welfare system as commons.

Today, we have the situation where various commons are being commercialized and sold off on the market. In order to face this type of situation, I think that an important issue for Social Work is to clarify the diversity of the welfare system, which produces Welfare as "Commons".⁽¹⁸⁾

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Notes

- (1) Modern conflicts, like Globalization and Modernization, are thought to depend on the Anthropological Roots and familial systems. Differences of the welfare state are thought in the same way. On this hypothesis of a determination of ideologies and religious or political beliefs by familial systems, see Todd (1998=1999, 1999=2008, and 2002=2003).
- (2) On the explanation of "stem family", see Todd (1999=2008). See also, Macfarlane (1978=1997)
- (3) Cf. The Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century (2000).
- (4) On the characteristics of "absolute nuclear family", see Todd (op. cit.)
- (5) On the relevance between "neo-liberalism" (as a new technique of governance) and "bio-politics", see Foucault (2004a=2008, 2004b=2007). See also, Agamben (2007=2010), Rosanvallon (1989=1990) and Todd (1998=1999).
- (6) Cf. Annual Health, Labour and Welfare Report 2008-2009. See also, Schoppa (2006=2007)
- (7) For detailed analysis of the tendency of thought (be affected by "neo-liberalism") and the historical context in Japan, see below, Watanabe (2007), Takahara (2009), and Nakamasa (2010). On the modernization and the placement of idea (liberalism/socialism, left/right etc.) in Japan, see also, Harootunian (2000=2007), Barshay (2004=2007), and Sakai (1996). And on "Neoliberalism" see Gray (1998=1999), Harvey (2003=2005, 2005a=2007a and 2005b=2007b) and Todd (2002=2003).
- (8) The Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century (2000), *Japan's Goals in the 21st Century, The Frontier Within: Individual Empowerment and Better Governance in the New Millennium*. (<http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/21century/report/pdfs/index.html>.)
- (9) Ibid. Ch. 3: "Achieving a Contented and Enriching Life": V. "Proposals for a Society That Offers Peace of Mind and Plenitude": 1. "Foundations of peace of mind": (4) "Social security (medical care, nursing care, and pensions) -ensuring a long vigorous, and healthy life.
- (10) Ibid. Ch. 1: "Overview": IV. "Japan's Twenty-First-Century Frontier": 3. "Strengthening the underpinnings of good governance": (3) "Strictly limiting the government's role".
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) Ibid. Ch. 1: "Overview": IV. "Japan's Twenty-First-Century Frontier": 2. "Making a strength of diversity": (1) "Putting individuals in control of their lives".
- (13) On the concept of "commons", see Uzawa (2000), Uzawa and Mogi, ed. (1994).
- (14) On the "governance" (governmentality / biopolitics / social security), see Foucault (2004b=2007) and Agamben (op. cit.)
- (15) See Ehrenreich (1989=1995, 2002=2006), Bauman (1998;2005=2008) and Yuasa (2007).
- (16) See Young (2007=2008).
- (17) On this words "bare life", see Agamben (1995=2003).
- (18) Cf. Polanyi (1957=1975), ch. 6.

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